



U.S. Department of Labor

Occupational Safety & Health
Administration



www.osha.gov



Evacuation Plans and Procedures

eTool



Shelter-in-place

Chemical, biological, or radiological contaminants may be released into the environment in such quantity and/or proximity to a place of business that it is safer to remain indoors rather than to evacuate employees. Such releases may be either accidental or intentional. Examples of situations that might result in a decision by an employer to institute "shelter-in-place" include an explosion in an ammonia refrigeration facility across the street, or a derailed and leaking tank car of chlorine on the rail line behind your place of business.

"Shelter-in-place" means selecting an interior room or rooms within your facility, or ones with no or few windows, and taking refuge there. In many cases, local authorities will issue advice to shelter-in-place via TV or radio.

- [Preparing to stay or go](#)
- [Shelter-in-place procedures](#)
- [Links to additional information](#)

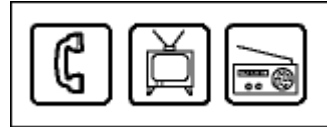


Related information:

- [Evacuating - Evacuation elements](#)
- [Fire - Do I fight or flee?](#)

Preparing to stay or go

Depending on your circumstances and the type of emergency, the first important decision is whether you stay put or get away. You should understand and plan for both possibilities. Use common sense and available information, including what you are learning here, to determine if there is immediate danger. In any emergency, local authorities may or may not immediately be able to provide information on what is happening and what you should do. Use available information to assess the situation. If you see large amounts of debris in the air, or if local authorities say the air is badly contaminated, you may want to "shelter-in-place." However, you should watch TV, listen to the radio, or check the Internet often for information or official instructions as it becomes available. If you're specifically told to evacuate or seek medical treatment, do so immediately.



Use telephones, televisions, and radios for receiving instructions or emergency information.



The Internet may be a valuable source of information during an emergency.

If you intend to include a shelter-in-place option in your emergency plan, be sure to keep the following in mind:



Alarm methods may vary depending on the type of emergency.

- Implement a means of [alerting your employees](#) to shelter-in-place that is easily distinguishable from that used to signal an evacuation.
- Train employees in the [shelter-in-place procedures](#) and their roles in implementing them.



Train employees for shelter-in-place procedures just the same as you would for evacuation procedures.

Specific procedures for shelter-in-place at a worksite may include the following:

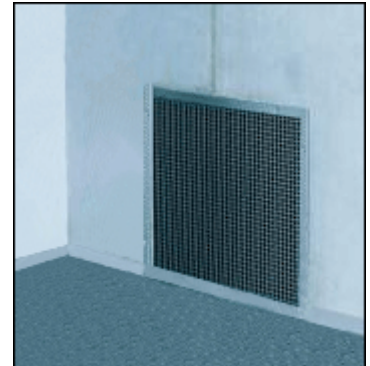
- Close the business.



- If there are customers, clients, or visitors in the building, provide for their safety by asking them to stay – not leave. When authorities provide directions to shelter-in-place, they want everyone to take those steps immediately. Do not drive or walk outdoors.
- Unless there is an imminent threat, ask employees, customers, clients, and visitors to call their emergency contact to let them know where they are and that they are safe.
- Turn on call-forwarding or alternative telephone answering systems or services. If the business has voice mail or an automated attendant, change the recording to indicate that the business is closed, and that staff and visitors are remaining in the building until authorities advise it is safe to leave.
- Quickly lock exterior doors and close windows, air vents, and fireplace dampers. Have employees familiar with your building's mechanical systems turn off all fans, heating and air conditioning systems, and clothes dryers. Some systems automatically provide for exchange of inside air with outside air. These systems, in particular, need to be turned off, sealed, or disabled.
- If you are told there is danger of explosion, close the window shades, blinds, or curtains.



Have employees and anyone else in the building call their emergency contacts, then turn on answering systems.



Close or tape-off all vents in the room.



Gather essential supplies such as a first-aid kit.

- Gather essential disaster supplies, such as nonperishable food, bottled water, battery-powered radios, first-aid supplies, flashlights, batteries, duct tape, plastic sheeting, and plastic garbage bags.
- Select interior room(s) above the ground floor, with the fewest windows or vents. The room(s) should have adequate space for everyone to be able to sit. Avoid overcrowding by selecting several rooms if necessary. Large storage closets, utility rooms, pantries, copy and conference rooms without exterior windows will work well. Avoid selecting a room with

mechanical equipment like ventilation blowers or pipes, because this equipment may not be able to be sealed from the outdoors.

- It is ideal to have a hard-wired telephone in the room(s) you select. Call emergency contacts and have the phone available if you need to report a life-threatening condition. Cellular telephone equipment may be overwhelmed or damaged during an emergency.
- Take your emergency supplies and go into the room you have designated. Seal all windows, doors, and vents with plastic sheeting and duct tape or anything else you have on hand.
- Consider precutting plastic sheeting (heavier than food wrap) to seal windows, doors, and air vents. Each piece should be several inches larger than the space you want to cover so that it lies flat against the wall. Label each piece with the location of where it fits. [See Fig. 1]
- Write down the names of everyone in the room, and call your business designated emergency contact to report who is in the room with you, and their affiliation with your business (employee, visitor, client, customer).
- Listen to the radio, watch television, or use the Internet for further instructions until you are told all is safe or to evacuate. Local officials may call for evacuation in specific areas at greatest risk in your community.



Fig. 1. Tape plastic sheeting over vents, windows, and doors to prevent contaminated air from entering the room.